

Road Trip to Lapland

Alan Pennington reports from Finland, Sweden & Norway

The EDXC Conference in Tampere, Finland, ended at 2pm on Sunday 20th August 2017, and after we'd said our farewells, twelve of us headed north on a road trip in three cars (including from the UK, Chrissy Brand, Dave Kenny and me), eventually to reach Nordkapp, above the Arctic Circle on the north coast of Norway, two days later.

Our first stop two hours later was the studio and transmitter site of **Scandinavian Weekend Radio** (SWR), north of Virrat on "Route 66", near the village of Liedenspohja. Here we were greeted by SWR DJ Trevor Twyman and station engineer Esa Saunamäki. Our visit to SWR featured on the cover of September's 'Communication' [see pages 7-8 below]. As well as the traditional yellow painted wooden main studio cabin pictured last month, their idyllic forest site has a large "barn" housing the SW, MW and FM transmitters plus the "Barn Studios" used when live bands are on the air. And nearby, importantly, a separate sauna hut with hot tub outside! Below (left) is the SW transmitters for 25mb (top) and 49mb. Also (right) is the MW 1602kHz mast in the forest a few hundred metres from the studio, which we were unable to visit during our visit, but SWR posted a photo on their Facebook page. More on SWR at <http://www.swradio.net/>



Our visit to SWR was regrettably short, as we had a long drive still to reach our overnight stop in the port city of **Oulu** on the Gulf of Bothnia on Finland's west coast. It's one of the world's most northerly cities with a population of nearly 200,000, but we just had a time for a stroll around the waterfront and a beer before bed at the Hotel Apollo.

Apart from SWR and Pispalan Radio on MW, **all radio broadcasting in Finland is on FM**. The FM band in Oulu was fairly busy: state-owned Ylesradio has stations Radio Yksi (1) (classical music, culture); YleX (pop music/youth); Radio Suomi (news, music, sports etc); Yle Puhe

(newstalk) and FSR Mix (Swedish language: mix of two stations, X3M (youth) and Radio Vega (culture, news etc)). Yle Radio Suomi also has local programming, Radio Suomi Oulu on 97.3. Yle is now funded since 2013 by a tax instead of a licence fee. Commercial media groups operate stations locally including: Radio Suomipop, Radio Rock, Radio Aalto (Sanoma Media); Radio Nova, Iskelmä, KISS, Radio Pooki, Radio City (Bauer Media), Radio Nostalgia, NRJ (NRJ). Smaller commercial stations such as Sea FM (pop hits) also broadcast in Oulu. But our stay in Oulu was short, as after breakfast the next day we continued our drive north.

Two hours later, we had reached **Tornio** at the northern most point of the Gulf of Bothnia. No border checks as we crossed the border here from Finland into Sweden, but the sight of a large Ikea store in **Haparanda** after we'd crossed the River Torne, confirmed we were now in **Sweden**!

We followed the Torne river north, which forms the Swedish-Finnish border for half its length and after just a few kilometres arrived at the house of **FM DXer Lars Lahti**, in the small village of Kukkola. Lars Lahti was not there to greet us, but his brother, Swedish ham Mauritz (SM2BYC) kindly showed around. Lars is the world's most northerly serious FM DXer as far as is known, and aerials on the roof, including for Eastern Europe OIRT band, was evidence of this. Lars also had room for a Beverage and Flag aerials for MW DXing in the large wild garden. But especially impressive was his brother Mauritz's ham aerial array behind the house (see photo right).

At the nearby **Kukkolaforseen** centre we saw traditional dip-net fisherman working off precarious wooden piers built out into the rapids of the Torne river (below) and enjoyed some nice coffee, cake and smoked fish before continuing our journey north on



Sweden's Route 99. After about 80km we crossed the Arctic Circle (Polcirkeln in Swedish) just south of the village of Juoksengi, where we stopped for obligatory photos at the information point, which also features a circle of flags of all the countries the Arctic Circle runs through. In summer this is a pleasant rural place with farms, pasture and trees, not really as bleak as I'd expect the Arctic Circle to be! Continuing north on Swedish Route 99 we crossed the Torne river (and border) back into Finland near Muonio, and drove north on the Finnish side of the border on the E8, eventually turning east on route 93 to a small village of

Hetta. Here the road turns north towards the Norwegian border and we had about 300km to drive to our overnight stop.

The landscape changed from forests of fir then pine, birch to Arctic scrub and late afternoon we crossed the seemingly deserted rain-swept customs post into **Norway** without stopping. I expected the radio choice in this remote high tundra area to be limited, but had read of the controversial headline-grabbing decision by Norway to switch off national FM radio during 2017. There was also to be a switchover from DAB to DAB+. I did a rescan on my Philips DA1200 DAB+/FM portable not long after crossing the border – at first no stations registered, but further north I had my first reception of **Norwegian DAB**, but only of the National commercial multiplex.

The far north-eastern part of Norway (Finnmark) where we were driving will be the last region to switch off FM (in December 2017) which is maybe why I couldn't hear the regional mux which carries NRK stations? These are the 16 channels (all music) I could hear on ch12D 229.072MHz in August (all DAB+ except P4 = DAB):

KISS N'DANCE

No Service

NORSK POP

NRJ NORGE

P10 COUNTRY

P4 Lyden Av Norge (Sound of Norway)

P5 HITS

P6 ROCK

P7 Klem

P8 POP

P9 RETRO

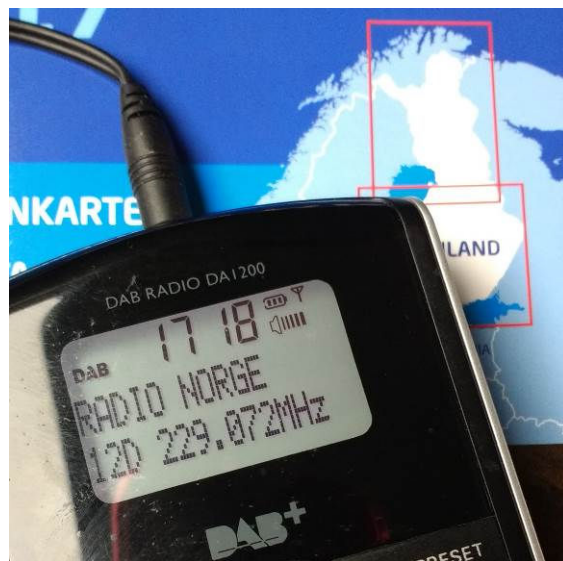
Radio Norge

Radio Rock

Radio Soft

Topp 40

Radio Vinyl



DAB reception in the car was patchy (I was only using a headphone antenna though) – DAB+ signals of course just vanish when weak – none of the burbling you get with DAB, or hissing you get with FM. There are a lot of road tunnels in Norway – only in one tunnel did reception continue in the tunnel. I understand the plan by the roads authority is to make reception possible in most tunnels. My favourite DAB station was Radio Vinyl playing 50s, 60s & 70s music with live DJs.

The road dropped down to **Alta**, the largest town in Finnmark region on Norway's northern coast and from there it was around 90km to our overnight stop at **Skaidi** hotel, a centre for fishing, hiking and hunting and for skiing in the winter. The hotel reminded me of a Scottish lodge, but with saunas and reindeer stew on the buffet! Tuesday morning, after an early breakfast, we drove to the most northerly point on our journey at **Nordkapp** (North Cape), a popular tourist destination often cited as the most northerly point in Europe (but not strictly so). The bleak windswept treeless tundra landscape at Nordkapp has a visitor centre to cater for coaches that arrive from the many cruise ships, including a post office and a memorial to the Murmansk convoys which had passed to the north of the cape during WWII, en route to the Barents Sea. I was very surprised in this wilderness to discover **BBC World Service** on FM being relayed by Radio Nordkapp on 103.9 MHz (4KW re <http://www.radionordkapp.no/dekningsomrade/>).



This is a local station set up in 1985, financed by advertising, bingo and Lytteravgift (Listener's fee). After a brief stop at the visitor centre we began the drive south, but taking a different route, further to the east. Radio Nordkapp had good coverage still, as I heard them again on the E6 road as it ran alongside the Porsanger fjord: with "Nordkapp" RDS on 107.6 MHz but still relaying BBCWS in English (a 4KW relay via Radio Porsanger according to the Nordkapp website).

This north eastern region of Norway, Finnmark, is home to the indigenous Sami people ("Finn" being the old Norse name for the Sami people). Our route southeast towards Finland took us through the village of **Karasjok**, which has been the seat of the Norwegian Sami Parliament since 1989. It is also the main HQ of the Norwegian public broadcaster's, **NRK's Sami Radio & TV** division. We stopped outside their modern studios (at Mari Boine geaidnu 12) where there is 5 foot high glass "lavvu" (Sami conical tent dwelling) unveiled at the opening of the new building in 2000 which contains a portable radio amongst more traditional Sami possessions.



Outside was a mobile studio used for reporting on the Spring reindeer migration (Giddajohtin), but on sledge skis, not wheels (above)! NRK Sami was heard on 94.7 MHz in Karasjok (with RDS: NRK_SAMI).

After leaving Karasjok, we drove east on route 92 and within 15km crossed the border back into Finland at Karigasniemi. Here the Finnish equivalent of NRK Sami, **YLE Sami Radio** could be heard on 100.8 (RDS: YLESAAME).

Route 92 passes through uninhabited wilderness, but unfortunately the road was being resurfaced which in Finland means totally removing the top surface for many miles, so we drove for much of the next 60km on a rough unmade surface. So we were very glad to reach the Kaamanen Kievari (inn) for a welcome Karhu beer and evening meal after which we headed east again on a minor road to visit the **Aihkiniemi DXpedition** cabin.

Right: reindeer browsing at the roadside near Inari

Aihkiniemi is the first purpose-built AM DXpedition site in Scandinavia, mostly constructed in 2010 and improved since. It's a cosy but utilitarian container-shaped cabin with electricity but no running water (so you have to drive 5km to get a shower!) plus a hi-tech



compost toilet. It has two rooms: a bedroom for two and a listening room with kitchen. The site benefits from thirteen Beverage aerials, permanently erected, each about 1km in length, so very directional! The Beverage wires hang about 3-5 metres above the ground to prevent damage by reindeer or moose. Nine aerials northwest of the cabin are fed by coax which crosses a small lake. The other four aerials southeast of the main road which is crossed by coax also.



—Mika Makelainen on latest DXpedition to Aihkiniemi with equipment two laptops (with Jaguar software) connected to two Perseus receivers, plus switchbox with amplifiers to connect to fourteen aerials.

There's a lot more about the Aihkiniemi DX cabin and the site on Mika's DXing.info website at: http://www.dxing.info/dxpeditions/aihkiniemi_dx_cabin_for_rent.dx including details if you'd like to rent the cabin, and what to take there (as well as your receivers). The latest DXpedition report from Aihkiniemi will be published here: <http://www.dxing.info/dxpeditions/aih72rep.htm>. On a summer's evening in August (complete with mosquitos) it was difficult to imagine the cabin in snowy Arctic mid-winter conditions! Some nice souvenirs pinned on the walls in the cabin also such as a KBRW (Barrow, Alaska) T-shirt and hat! As darkness approached, we headed to our overnight stay nearby at Nitsijärvi cabins.

Wednesday morning, after breakfast in nearby **Inari**, we headed west to see the now well-known DX-pedition site at **Lemmenjoki**, about 40km southwest of Inari on the edge of the National Park of that name (68°46'17"N 26°18'57"E). The original DX cabin here (below) was discovered back in 1981, and the first DXpedition there was in December of that year. Since then there have been many more visits by Finnish DXers – the latest DXpedition (in September 2017) is number 386! Dxpeditons to Lapland began back in the early 1970s, but Lemmenjoki was the first to benefit from having some permanent aerials built. Nowadays there is a large bungalow next to the old cottage used by DXers, and we were met there by owner, Mr Aslak Jomppanen, a local Sami. The original old cabin is still there, but is now a bit dilapidated, though it still has evidence of past DXpeditions there such



as a world map on the wall. We walked up the hillside to the north of the site and saw some of the Beverage aersals hung in the trees to avoid damage by animals. There are around 12 permanent Beverage aersals (800-1200m in length), and other temporary ones can be added. From early December, the sun doesn't rise at this northerly location, though there is a sort of twilight for 3 or 4 hours in the middle of the day during which aersals can be checked and maintained. When we visited, there was an abundance of berries on the short bushes on the hillside, but of course in winter, there is snow. At both Lemmenjoki and Aihkiniemi reception of Australia, Hawaii, Alaska and west coast North America are regular, given good conditions – reports are posted on Tapio Kalmi's website at: <http://www.tapiokalmi.net/dx/lem/index.html>. There is also an introduction to Lemmenjoki at: <http://www.dxing.info/dxpeditons/lemmenjoki.dx>.

From Lemmenjoki, we drove back to Inari and called at the HQ for **YLE Sami Radio** there. The first regular YLE programmes in the Sami language were broadcast in 1947 for just 15 minutes on Mondays on MW from Oulu. They have gradually expanded since those small beginnings, soon moving to the regional radio from Rovaniemi as broadcasts from Oulu were hard to hear in Lapland. (At the time, Oulu Radio was on the unusual frequency of 433 kHz – Finnish radios at the time had an extended longwave band in order to receive it. It moved to 540 kHz in the 1970s). In 1987, YLE Sami programmes moved to a new third channel and the present YLE Sami HQ building in Inari was completed – we visited the building but it seemed deserted – apparently closed for renovation according to a guy who came out to see who we were. In 1991 a fourth VHF channel for Sami Radio in northern Finland opened and links were made with Sami stations in Norway and Sweden. You can read a detailed history of YLE Sami radio at: https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/sapmi/history_of_yle_sapmi/6611917.



Leaving Inari we made the five hour 400km drive south to **Rovaniemi**, crossing back over the Arctic Circle southbound just north of the city, where **Santa Claus Village** is sited. This big tourist destination is the "official" home of Santa, and it was amusing to see the Post Office there, staffed by "elves". Santa Claus received around 500,000 letters in 2016: top three countries to send letters to Santa were 1. China, 2. Poland, 3. Italy. That night in Rovaniemi we pleased to meet up with BDXC member Antti Hemmilä who lives in the city for a pizza and local beer. The next day, Dave Kenny and I visited the city's excellent Arktikum Science museum (<http://www.arktikum.fi/en/home.html>) before flying back to London via Helsinki.

The others drove the 900km back to Helsinki by car. The total trip had been about 3,400km! A very packed and fascinating five-day road trip following the EDXC conference in Tampere: very many thanks to Risto Vähäkainu for organising the trip so well and to the three drivers Henri Ekman, Raimi Kaksonen and Jarmo Salmi! (© **Alan Pennington, British DX Club**)

Scandinavian Weekend Radio, Finland

First stop on our tour after the recent EDXC conference was to Scandinavian Weekend Radio at Virrat, a two-hour drive north of Tampere. SWR's studios are idyllically located in a forest surrounded by birch and pine trees, complete with an outdoor hot tub and sauna! SWR broadcasts for 24 hours once a month on two SW frequencies as well as locally on MW 1602 kHz and FM 94.9 MHz. The MW and SW transmitters radiate about 100 Watts with FM at 250 Watts. We were met by Trevor Twyman ('Tricky Trev' pictured, in studio) and station engineer Esa Saunamäki (pictured standing by the FM and SW transmitter cabinet).



SWR uses a horizontal wire for SW transmissions and a vertical tower for MW - both located in the woods a short distance from the studio. An impressive yagi aerial (bottom right) for the 25m band transmitter on the mast next to the studio cottage (above left) is no longer used as it interferes with the FM antennas on the same mast. The station has acquired two old 1.5 kW maritime transmitters which may help to boost MW power in the future, although much work will be needed to get them operational. SWR's next broadcast is on 7 October 2017 at 0000-2400 Finnish time (2100 UTC Friday until 2100 UTC Saturday). The SW frequencies are 25m 11690 or 11720; 49m 5980 or 6170 kHz.

Below: Our group outside the SWR studio.



Below (left to right): Alan Pennington, Dave Kenny and SWR's engineer Esa Saunamäki

